

SITUATION REPORT NO. 1
INCIDENT NO. 99-093
DATE: November 1, 1999 TIME: 6:00 p.m.

TO: Governor Edward T. Schafer
State Capitol
Bismarck, N.D. 58505

1. NATURE OF DISASTER: Fires Statewide --- Sustained wind gusts of up to 76 miles per hour (mph) contributed to the spread of fires reported throughout North Dakota on October 31-November 1. In some cases, controlled cropland burns blazed out of control when gusty winds pushed flames into adjoining lands.
2. DEATHS AND INJURIES: A firefighter in Ward County suffered from smoke inhalation.
3. DAMAGES: A strong low pressure system moving into Ontario and a strong high pressure system pushing into the northern Rockies brought high winds into North Dakota. A resulting cold front pushed across the state during October 31-November 1, the National Weather Service (NWS) reported. In McKenzie County, high winds caused two prairie fires to quickly spread, and cropland burns blazed out of control in Ward, Williams, Barnes, Walsh and Pembina Counties. Winds also damaged signs, roofs of homes and businesses, and knocked down fences and power lines in these counties, as well as Ramsey County and the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Fort Berthold Reservation.

The NWS issued a high wind warning for the state because of northwest winds of 30 to 40 mph with gusts of 55 mph. Cities and wind gusts recorded by the NWS are as follows: Williston, 67 mph; Dickinson, 69 mph; Hettinger, 66 mph; Minot Airport, 66 mph; Minot Air Force Base, 67 mph; Garrison, 69 mph; Bismarck, 61, mph; Streeter, 75 mph; Devils Lake, 76 mph; Jamestown, 64 mph; Grand Forks, 54 mph; and Fargo, 56 mph. Officials for the NWS advised drivers of high profile vehicles to pull over until the winds subside.

In McKenzie County, less than one dozen farm families were evacuated when two fires erupted the evening of October 31. The first fire, which is under control, occurred seven miles south of Watford City and covered roughly 13,000 acres. It measured 14 miles long by three miles wide. Firefighters had a second blaze under control approximately 23 miles southwest of Alexander. This fire extended

23 miles long and eight miles wide. Throughout the county, there are numerous hot spots in controlled areas that require monitoring. One abandoned farm was destroyed seven miles east of the North Dakota-Montana border along N.D. Highway 68.

In neighboring Williams County, fires were reported near Ray, Grenora, Alamo and Williston, keeping firefighters busy until the last fire was brought under control by 7:30 a.m. on November 1. One unoccupied mobile home along the Little Muddy Creek burned. Officials reported that the fire was a result of a cropland burn.

Officials for Three Affiliated Tribes reported that winds in excess of 60 mph caused roof and siding damage to homes. Winds tipped one mobile home on its side. Flying debris broke windows on vehicles and homes. High winds also damaged roofs at two schools, downed power lines and trees and moved hay bales for as far as one mile. A power outage occurred in one community.

Several rural fires of varying intensity were reported throughout Ward County near the cities of Makoti, Carpio, Sawyer, Burlington, Surrey and Minot. Officials attributed the cause of these fires to controlled cropland burns that blazed out of control because of high winds the evening of October 31. No property damages have been reported at this time.

In Barnes County, officials reported power outages caused by trees falling on power lines. Fires were reported in Dazey, Sanborn, River Road north of Valley City and at a farm south of Valley City after controlled fires burned out of control. In addition, gusty winds caused damages to buildings, fences and signs.

Gusty winds of up to 76 mph in the Ramsey County area blew off one-third of a motel's roof in Devils Lake and knocked tree branches down throughout the city. In addition, high winds disrupted telephone service in several locations throughout Ramsey County and blew debris onto the Woods-Rutten Road. Traffic continued on the road. However, school bus service was discontinued on roads crossing Devils Lake.

In Walsh County, a number of fires over the last two weeks have kept firefighters from 10 fire departments busy. Most involved grassland or woodland. Fires destroyed the house, barn and storage area at one vacant farmstead. High winds knocked trees over and damaged buildings at several locations.

In Pembina County, all fire departments responded to grass fires that damaged farm yards, two combines and one tractor.

4. RESOURCES:

LOCAL: Throughout the state, support to fire response efforts was provided by local fire department firefighters, highway departments, utility companies,

communications centers, public works crews, city police, sheriff's deputies and emergency management staff.

STATE: State Radio Communications has provided assistance to law enforcement and fire departments. Other state agencies monitoring conditions include the Governor's Office, N.D. Parks and Recreation Department, N.D. Game and Fish Department, State Fire Marshal's Office and North Dakota Emergency Management

FEDERAL: The U.S. Forest Service, Minot Air Force Base Fire Department, Bureau of Indian Affairs (New Town) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided support to fire-fighting efforts, and the NWS issued updated reports about wind and weather conditions.

5. VOLUNTEER ACTION: In Walsh County, residents have provided food and water to volunteer firefighters.
6. MAJOR ACTIONS: Firefighters throughout the state helped battle blazes in their jurisdictions and assisted crews in neighboring areas to battle fires that winds quickly spread during October 31-November 1.

McKenzie County sheriff's deputies slowed traffic on U.S. Highway 85, south of Watford City, because of dense smoke that significantly reduced visibility. Because of similar conditions, North Dakota Highway Patrol troopers closed the westbound and southbound lanes at the intersection of N.D. Highway 68 and 16 from approximately 7:30 p.m. October 31 until 2:00 a.m. November 1. In addition, troopers closed the northbound lane of N.D. Highway 16 at the McKenzie County Highway 38 intersection during the same time period.

Representatives of the Governor's Office, N.D. Parks and Recreation Department, N.D. Game and Fish Department, State Fire Marshal's Office and North Dakota Emergency Management met November 1 to discuss the North Dakota Rangeland Fire Danger Index. The NWS discontinues issuing Index on October 31; however, because of recent conditions, the NWS will continue issuing the report until the winter's first significant precipitation.

Firefighters from Bowman and Slope Counties responded to fires in Slope County, Montana and South Dakota, through mutual aid agreements.

7. ASSISTANCE NEEDED: No requests for outside assistance have been reported at this time.
8. OUTSIDE HELP ON SCENE: Through mutual aid agreements, fire crews throughout the state helped with fires not only in North Dakota but also in Montana and South Dakota.

9. OTHER: Situation Reports published by North Dakota Emergency Management are posted on the Division's internet home page. The address is:
<http://www.state.nd.us/dem>.

Douglas C. Friez, State Director